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## Full Tone to Sound Feminine: Analyzing the Role of Tonal Variants in Identity Construction

### Abstract

Tone neutralization in Standard Mandarin requires syllables in a weakly-stressed position to be destressed and toneless (Chao, 1968), yet such a process is often incomplete in some Mandarin dialects, e.g., Taiwanese-accented Mandarin (Huang, 2012, 2018). For instance, the metrically weak syllable *bai* in *míng2bai0* ('to understand, clear') is usually destressed in Standard Mandarin but fully realized as a rising tone (*míng2bái2*) in non-standard varieties. Recent studies have observed that Standard Mandarin speakers, especially young females, tend to performatively adopt this suprasegmental linguistic feature to index their "cosmopolitan" and "youthful" social personae (Zhang 2005, 2018). The current study provides a spoken-corpus analysis to address how the "cute" social persona is indexed in such prosodic variables. A sharp contrast in the full tone usage among the female speakers emerged, such that the speakers who adopted a "cute" persona use distinctively high percentages of full tones, as opposed to the speakers who were labelled "independent" and "strong-minded". However, there was no split among males, in that their full tone percentages were generally low regardless of their social personae. Full tone usages also vary across topics, shown by a "cute" speaker that used full tones more frequently on cosmetic topics compared to formal topics. These results suggest that full tone realization is more likely a characteristic-specific feature, indexing the "cute" social persona of the speaker, instead of a purely "cosmopolitan-related" linguistic feature.

# Full Tone to Sound Feminine: Analyzing the Role of Tonal Variants in Identity Construction

Feier Gao\*

## 1 Introduction

Central to the third wave of sociolinguistic studies on variation is the view that linguistic variables are treated as semiotic resources which do not simply reflect, but also construct social identities of speakers (Eckert 2012). Distinct from the first and the second wave of variationist studies, the third wave moves from the notion which treats language variation as the consequence of social affiliation (e.g., gender, economic class, ethnography, etc.) and emphasizes the social indexical meaning conveyed through stylistic speech practices.

A series of works by Zhang (2005, 2006, 2008, 2018) investigates the social meanings indexed in the linguistic variables used by the yuppie Chinese, which refers to the young professionals working in foreign-owned enterprises in Beijing in the late 1990s when her field research was conducted. The yuppie Chinese, who are highly imbued with sophisticated lifestyles, have developed a speech pattern that contrasts with their peers who work in state-owned companies in Beijing by sometimes dropping the linguistic features of the local Beijing dialect (e.g., rhotacization) and by making use of the overseas Mandarin variables (e.g., Taiwanese-accented Mandarin). Full tone realization is one of the linguistic features commonly found in the *Gāngtái*-accented (abbreviation of Hong Kong and Taiwan) Mandarin (Zhang 2005); this refers to the phenomenon that tones of the weakly stressed syllables are fully realized, for example, the toneless syllable *bai* in *míng2bái0* ‘understand’ in Standard Mandarin is fully realized as rising tone (*míng2bái2*) in non-standard Mandarin varieties. Yuppie Chinese, according to Zhang (2005), fully realized the tones of those metrically weak syllables to index their cosmopolitan social identity.

It has also been demonstrated that the full tone feature is distinctively favored by female over male yuppies (Zhang 2005), however, the potential reason leading to this gender-specific pattern has not been fully discussed in the literature. In the present study, I also focus on the full tone feature but hope to elaborate on Zhang’s research by answering the following questions: Does the full tone variable index other social meanings beyond cosmopolitan identity, such as femininity? Is there individual variation of the full tone usage among female speakers? And what kind of female speakers tend to favor the full tone?

## 2 Feminine speech

Linguistic variables indexing femininity in Mandarin have been sparsely discussed in the previous literature. However, there are two feminine speech styles in East Asian languages that have attracted the attention of researchers—*kawaii* in Japanese and *aegyo* in Korean. The linguistic symbols used in the speech of *kawaii* and *aegyo* index the cuteness and feminine characteristics of the speaker.

### 2.1 *Kawaii* and *aegyo*: Cuteness in Japan and South Korea

Speech styles characterized as *kawaii* in Japanese and *aegyo* in Korean often include certain prosodic attributes. High vocal pitch has been identified as a key symbol in practicing *kawaii*, with the pitch often rising to a level above what the speaker normally uses in casual speech. Such vocal style often stamps the self-expression of youthfulness and cuteness, classified as a cultural style “burikko” (Miller 2004). Korean *aegyo* highlights the intensified rising-falling intonation (LHL) and the elongated contours in colloquial communication (Puzar and Hong 2018), associating childish characteristics with the talkers. *Aegyo*, which is commonly found in heterosexual

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interaction, is often motivated by the intention to avoid conflict in interpersonal contact and is used as a social strategy to smooth the difficult negotiations of power and blur the interpersonal border (Puzar 2011). In addition, nasalized vowels and baby-talk registers are commonly found in both *kawaii* and *aegyo* and are often tied to a series of physical features and mannerisms such as covering the mouth when smiling or laughing (Allison 2006, Burdelski 2010, Miller 2004, Puzar and Hong 2018, Strong 2012). The emergence of such speech styles is in accordance with the rising ideology of femininity in Japan and South Korea, highlighting cuteness as one of the crucial cultural elements in contemporary East Asia countries (Moon 2010).

*Kawaii* and *aegyo* are both stylistic practices in which prosodic variations are used to index cuteness as a new type of femininity, however, there is a lack of research on how femininity is represented by Mandarin female speakers. Despite recent studies in sociolinguistics that have focused on how speakers use intonational variables to index social meanings (Holliday 2016, Holliday and Villarreal 2018), studies on the prosodic manipulation on the lexical level (i.e., lexical tones) are uncommon. Recalling that Zhang (2005) showed that female yuppies overwhelmingly used more full tones than male yuppies did, it is appropriate to ask whether full tone realization, which is a type of prosodic variation on the lexical level, indexes solely feminine gender, or can it index social meaning beyond that dimension, such as a cute persona. Although the contrast on the full tone usage exhibits a gender-specific pattern, the usage split among female talkers is still unknown. In the present study, I analyze how Standard Mandarin speakers manipulate the realization of lexical tones to construct their social identities, especially the cute and feminine characteristics recently emerging in contemporary mainland China.

## 2.2 *Sajiao*: a new female persona in China

Since the late 1970s, China has been undergoing economic reforms and drastic changes in the social, cultural and ideological arenas. Mainland China's opening to the international market has made it an active participant in the globalization process. Globalization has not only achieved transnational cooperation, but also has led to contact and interaction with different language varieties. While overseas investment has become an indispensable impetus to mainland China's economic development, non-mainland Chinese popular cultures have exposed to the mainland younger generation a series of sophisticated and glamorous lifestyles with their music and dramas (Zhang 2005). There has risen a fanatic trend among the mainland audience of purchasing the cosmetic brands and mimicking the non-mainland Mandarin accents that have appeared in the mass media.

Resonating with the change of lifestyles among the younger generation, a new ideology of femininity has arisen in contemporary China. It spotlights the youthful and delicate female personae and contrasts with the collective, dogmatic and communitarian one which has been dominant for decades. Related to *kawaii* and *aegyo*, a new speech style has been borne out of a femininity ideology—*sajiao*, which is prompted to incite tenderness of the speakers by acting as a “spoiled” child or throwing a public tantrum, especially in the presence of their significant others (Qiu 2013). Qiu observes a series of semiotic symbols that is often associated to the image of cute and childish persona, such as lollipops, cheeky faces, sparkling accessories and use of make-ups, etc. The popular culture of Hong Kong and Taiwan has brought new cultural icons to mainland China, among which the cute and feminine characters and acts appearing in the media triggered a frenzy-like mimicking trend among the female audiences who tend to build a linkage between the *sajiao* acts and the non-mainland Mandarin accents. Full tone realization, which is a very salient feature of overseas Mandarin varieties to the mainlanders, is one of the most targeted linguistic variables.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Full tone realization in Standard Mandarin

Full tone realization originates from the non-mainland Mandarin varieties and is distinct from the phenomenon of tone neutralization commonly found in the conventional Beijing-dialect-based Standard Mandarin. It is an innovative and supraregional linguistic practice in which tones of the weakly stressed syllables are fully realized; this is different from Standard Mandarin where tone neutralization requires syllables in a weakly-stressed position to be destressed and toneless (Chao

1968, Duanmu 1990, Shen 1988, Yip 1980). For example, the second syllable *bai* in the disyllabic compound *míng2bai0* ‘understand’ is weakly stressed and supposed to be neutralized (i.e., T0) in Standard Mandarin, but it is fully realized as tone 2 (*míng2bai2*) in the non-mainland Mandarin. Examples of tonal/stress assignment in Mandarin compounds are given below in Table 1.

disyllabic word	(σ σ)	e.g., ‘understand’
	x x	/míng2 báí2/
	x	[míng2 bai0]
trisyllabic word	(σ σ σ)	e.g., ‘cannot get up’
	x x x	/qǐ3 bù4 láí2/
	x	[qǐ3 bu0 láí2]
quadrisyllabic word	(σ σ σ σ)	e.g., ‘confused’
	x x x x	/(xǐ1 lǐ3 hú2 tú2)/
	x	[(xǐ1 li0 hú2 tú2)]
	(σ σ) (σ σ)	e.g., ‘extremely happy’
	x x x x	/(shǒu3 wú3) (zú2 dǎo3)/
	x x	[(shǒu3 wu0) (zú2 dao0)]

Table 1: Three types of tonal/stress assignment in Mandarin compounds (from Lin 2001)

As seen in Table 1, in a disyllabic word, with its initial syllable stressed, the second syllable is destressed and carries a neutral tone. The second syllable in a trisyllabic word is destressed after applying the domain-initial stress rule on its first syllable, while the third syllable in the domain—since it occurs after a stressless syllable—is not destressed and carries the original citation tone. Quadrisyllabic words show different stress patterns according to their syntactic constituents: if the word is in a single domain, only the second syllable is destressed since it occurs after a domain-initial syllable; if the word contains two domains, it is treated as a combination of two disyllabic words—with the second and fourth syllables destressed and carrying neutral tones (Lin 2001). Although the metrically weak syllables get destressed and lose their lexical tones in Standard Mandarin, tone neutralization is not fully complete in some Mandarin dialects, such as Taiwanese Mandarin, and hence syllables are all equally stressed (Huang 2012, 2018). Zhang (2005, 2018) notes that yuppie Chinese adopt this supraregional prosodic feature to construct their cosmopolitan and sophisticated social identities and form a contrast with the local professionals in Beijing. In the current study, I also focus on full tone realization and analyze how it interacts with the construction of cute persona.

### 3.2 A spoken-corpus analysis

A spoken-corpus analysis was conducted. The spoken corpus was created from publicly accessible vlogs or online documentaries which are popular among younger Chinese. For each targeted speaker, the video used for analysis was minimally 20 minutes. The vlogs of 16 speakers (9 females & 7 males) were analyzed in this research, and they are all mainland Chinese from the (upper-)middle class and were living abroad at the time the videos were taken. These vlogs and documentaries cover multiple topics including school life (e.g., majors, exams and homework), cosmetics and clothing, hanging out with friends, events in student organizations, internships and jobs, etc.

Despite the “cosmopolitan” self-presentation in these videos, the speakers were categorized into four types based on the content of their vlogs: 1) female talkers who are self-presented as feminine and cute; 2) female talkers who are self-presented as independent and strong-minded; 3) male talkers who are self-presented as being active at “outdoor” events; 4) male talkers who are self-presented

as the “indoor” (“geek”) type. Tokens of both full tone variants and destressed tones were coded impressionistically by the author, who is a native speaker of Standard Mandarin. The proportions of full tones and destressed tones were calculated for each speaker. A fully realized syllable in a weakly stressed position was counted as a full tone. Also, tonal realization of an underlyingly toneless syllable (e.g., classifier, diminutive syllable, particle) was also considered, but not if it occurred in sentence-final position, since the final position is usually affected by the final-lengthening rule and hence is mostly fully realized.

### 3.3 Speaker information

The spoken data of 16 speakers (9 females & 7 males) were transcribed and analyzed in this study. Table 2 and 3 below summarize the basic information of the speakers, which include gender, age, occupation, interests, and brief content-description of their vlogs. Each speaker was assigned a letter (female: A-I, male: A-G) as a pseudonym.

Female speakers A-E were characterized as “feminine” or “cute” since they often displayed these features of themselves, as seen in their choices of colorful outfits, sparkling-style make-ups and cute accessories. Also, those female speakers often show *sajiao* personality when talking to their significant others. For example, speaker A expressed a *sajiao*-style tantrum believing that her boyfriend did not care enough for her because he thought their dinner date was boring. Female speakers F-I were categorized into the “non-cute” group because they often show independent and strong-minded characteristics when dealing with the issues from work or school. Most of those “non-cute” females showed a strong power of self-discipline, as in their strictness to diet, fitness, or time management; the clothes and make-up styles of those speakers were sophisticated, yet very much professional and hardly involved any “cute” or “youthful” elements. One of the female speakers (speaker I) filmed an episode of giving birth to her daughter, in which she showed extraordinary calmness and explained the functions of the hospital facilities in an organized and detailed way even when suffering contractions.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	General interests & vlog content
A	female	22	undergraduate student	make-up tutorials, dress haul, GMAT preparation, travelling plans
B	female	20+	undergraduate student	make-up tutorials, furniture assembling, music festival
C	female	25+	kindergarten teacher	introducing school facility, attending a yoga class, hanging out with kids
D	female	17	high school student	complaining about her host family, group discussion with classmates
E	female	23+	make-up vlogger	make-up tutorials, frustration of living abroad alone
F	female	21	senior student, intern	preparing for class, campus tour, interview experience
G	female	26	real estate manager	fitness, experience of H1B visa application, hanging out with friends
H	female	25+	Ph.D. student in Education	coursework, advices from her mentors, stress management
I	female	26	make-up vlogger, fashion business	make-up tutorials, cosmetic product assessments, pregnancy and delivery

Table 2: Basic information of 9 female speakers (female, A-I)

Male speakers were labelled in a similar way. Three speakers (male, A-C) were categorized as “hip” and four others as “non-hip” (male, D-G) based on the personae that they showed in the vlogs. For example, male speaker B was labelled as a “hip” dancer because his vlogs were mostly

concerned with his dancing crew and his outfits always conform to what he thought as “SWAG”; speaker D was identified as a “non-hip” geek, as seen in his vlogs that his major interest was staying indoor and playing video games.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation	General interests & vlog content
A	male	20+	undergraduate student, major in Arts	campus tour, attending a sculpture class, cooking experience
B	male	20+	undergraduate student, hip-hop dancer	dancing tutorials, hanging out with dancers and students
C	male	20+	undergraduate student, computer science major	preparation for exams, fitness, interests in fancy cars
D	male	23	undergraduate student, “geek”	room tour, player levels in video games, ordering food from a Chinese restaurant
E	male	20+	undergraduate student, geography major	organizing events, correspondence with club members
F	male	25	manager of a self-owned souvenir store	introducing family background, socializing with customers and staff
G	male	25+	Ph.D. student, science major	tips for the graduate school application in Germany

Table 3: Basic information of 7 male speakers (male, A-G)

Based on previous studies, it is hypothesized that that the female talkers overwhelmingly favor the full tone more than the male talkers do (Zhang 2005). Moreover, I expect to find another split of full tone usage within the female group—that the female talkers who self-presented as “cute” use more full tones as opposed to the females characterized as “non-cute”. I do not, however, expect to find any split among the male talkers, regardless of their social personae (“hip” or “non-hip”).

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Variation among female speakers

Figure 1 shows the percentages of full tones and destressed tones of each female speaker. It can be observed that speakers A-E used a saliently high proportion of full tones in their speech, as opposed to speakers F-I who seldom realized full tones on the weak syllables.

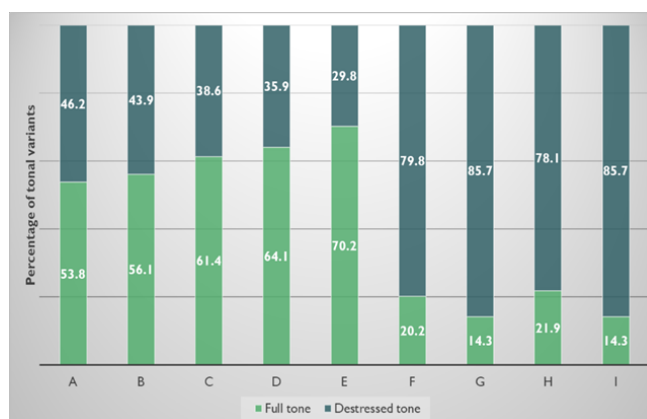


Figure 1: Full tone realization among 9 female speakers (female, A-I)

Speakers A-E are the females who displayed cute identity and *sajiao* persona in their vlogs, while speakers F-I are the ones who presented independent and strong-minded styles. These two groups of female speakers differed greatly in their full tone usage, in that the full tone variants used by the cute speakers were all above 50% and the highest one (speaker E) reached 70%; the full tone percentages of the non-cute speakers were much lower (approximately 14%-20%).

Excerpts 1 and 2 are parts of the vlog speech from female speaker A and I. Frequent use of full tones was found in the first excerpt, in which speaker A was performing a *sajiao* style, complaining that her roommates and boyfriend were all gone for the holiday and she was the only one who is left behind. She also expressed a sense of insecurity when staying at home alone at night with a series of actions such as covering the mouth to show her panic. It is also interesting that speaker A addressed her boyfriend by the vocative *gege* (T3-T2), which means ‘older brother’; the T3-T2 tonal form produced by the speaker did not follow the tone neutralization rule of the diminutive form in Standard Mandarin, but conformed instead to the Taiwanese Mandarin accent. Excerpt 2 is part of the labor vlog by female speaker I, who described her suffering from contraction when she was still on epidural. It is observed that the speaker showed independence and discipline, as seen in her organized description of her labor experience, and her usage of full tone was saliently infrequent.

Excerpt 1: female speaker A (make-up vlogger, cute persona)

- 1 ...*zheng.ge jia de ren dou chu.qu(T4) le, bao.kuo(T4) ge.ge(T2)...dou...you an.pai(T2) ...*  
...everybody in our house went out, including my boyfriend...they all have plans
- 2 *suo.yi(T0) wo zuo.tian jiu ba ta song.qu(T4) ji.chang,*  
so I just dropped him off at the airport
- 3 *ta jiu.qu(T4) zhao ta San Diego de peng.you(T3) le.*  
he went to visit his friend in San Diego
- 4 ...*zuo.tian wan.shang(T4) xi.zao de shi.hou(T4) tu.ran(T0) you.dian(T3) hai.pa...wo jiu jue.de(T0) ahh...ru.guo(T3) wo xi.tou de shi.hou(T4)...wai...you huai.ren jin.lai zen.me(T0).ban.*  
...I felt a bit scared last night when I was in the bathroom...ahh...I was thinking what if someone breaks in when I was washing my hair.

Excerpt 2: female speaker I (make-up vlogger, non-cute persona)

- 1 ...*jiu.shi(T0) te.bie(T0) te.bie(T0) teng, dang.shi(T0) shi...mei liang fen.zhong(T1) teng yi.ci(T0), mei.yi(T0).ci teng...yi fen.zhong,*  
...like terribly painful, it came ...every two minutes and lasted for like one minute each time,
- 2 *jiu hen.teng...jiu.shi(T0) biao.lei de nei.zhong.*  
it was painful as hell...I was even tearing.
- 3 *hou.lai(T2) ne, da.le wu.tong yi.hou(T0) jiu...zai.ye(T0) mei.you(T0) gan.jue(T0) le.*  
later...I didn’t feel anything after getting an analgesic.
- 4 ...*suo.yi(T0) wo jue.de(T0) wu.tong zhen.de(T0) ting hao de.*  
...so I think the epidural is really great.

#### 4.2 Variation among male speakers

Figure 2 shows the percentages of full tones and destressed tones used by the male speakers in their vlog speech. Different from the female speakers, there is no split of full tone usage among male speakers, and the proportions of the full tones were all relatively low.

Recall that the male speakers A-C were labelled as “hip” and speakers D-G as “non-hip”, however, a split in the usage of the full tone usage was not found, despite the differences of personae. The percentages of the full tone variants among the male speakers were generally very low, with the two lowest proportions dropping to around 10% and the highest one only reaching 23.3%. It can be generalized from the results that male speakers, regardless of their social identities and personae, generally use full tone variants much less frequently than female speakers do.

Excerpt 3: male speaker B (hip-hop dancer, hip persona)

- 1 ...*ran.hou...wo kai.shi(T0) hui zuo yi.xie hen jian.dan(T0) de dong.zuo.*  
...then...I started from some very basic moves.



- 2 ...*dang ta.men kan.dao(T0) yi.ge ren zai...na.ge...party room li.mian tiao ji.xie(T0).wu de shi.hou(T0), ta.men hui jue.(de)T0...te.bie(T0) te.bie(T0) shuai.*  
...when they saw a person doing popping dance in that party room by himself, they thought it was too “swag”!
- 3 *Cong na (yi).ke kai.shi...gan.jue...da.jia de jiao.dian(T0) dou fang.zai(T0) wo shen.shang(T4) le.*  
From that time, I felt that I was under a spotlight or something.
- 4 *da.jia(T0) hui yuan.yi(T0) gen.wo jiao.liu, (hui) gen.wo jiang shuo(T0) ‘wa, ni hao diao, neng.bu(T0).neng jiao ge peng.you’...*  
People just start to hang out with me, and they were like ‘Wow, you are terrific. Wanna join us?’

Excerpt 4: male speaker D (geek, non-hip persona)

- 1 *qi.shi(T0) zhe si.nian ba, jiu.shi(T0) zi.ji(T0) keng zi.ji.*  
Honestly, I have been wasting my own time in the past four years.
- 2 *jiu.shi(T0) yin.wei...nei.hui.r...gao.san de shi.hou(T0) ba,*  
it was because at that time...at the senior year in high school,
- 3 *lai zhe.bian...ran.hou(T0) jia.li(T0) ren ye bu.tai(T0) qing.chu,*  
when I came here (Canada)...and my parents had no idea what’s going on,
- 4 *wo ye bu zen.me(T0) qing.chu(T0) shen.qing(T0) da.xue de shi.r...*  
either did I have any ideas about college application...

Excerpts 3 and 4 showed parts of the vlog speech of male speaker B and D. Low proportions of full tone usage were found in both the two excerpts, and the two male speakers basically destressed all the syllables in the metrically weak positions, as in line with the tone neutralization rule in Standard Mandarin. In addition, speaker B showed a certain amount of weakening and deletion on the weak syllables and speaker D used rhotacization very often in his speech. These linguistic phenomena are considered parts of the general northern Mandarin dialectal features. Despite distinct social personae, such that speaker B is active in dancing and socializing while speaker D is less interested in outdoor activities and showed limited social aspiration, the full tone usage between these two speakers showed no salient difference.

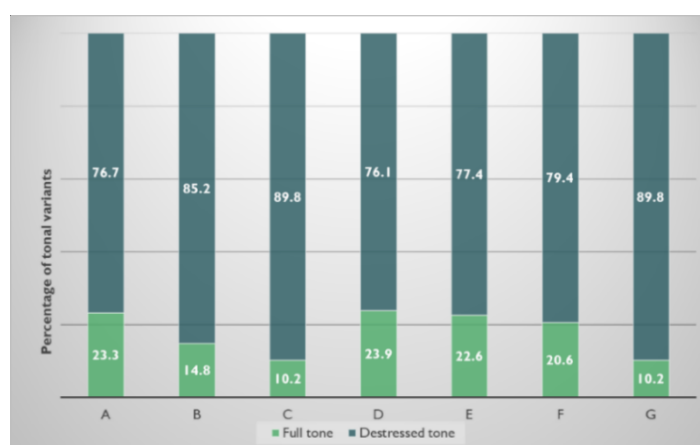


Figure 2: Full tone realization among 7 male speakers (male, A-G)

### 4.3 Intraspeaker variation of full tones

Full tone usage also varied among different topics. Figure 3 represents the tonal variation exhibited by female speaker A, who was labelled as “cute” and “feminine” based on her vlogs.

There is a salient variation of the full tone usage in her vlog speech. In most of her episodes, female speaker A presented cute and child-like characteristics and showed her wide expertise on clothing and cosmetic products. Although being an amateur make-up vlogger, the speaker was particularly concerned with her daily outfits and make-ups and shared her “outfit of the day” with subscribers in the beginning of each vlog episode. Her usage of full tone variants seemed to vary according to the topics. When the speaker was talking about the areas where she is an expert on, such as commenting on cosmetic products, doing make-up tutorials, and hanging out with friends, she used saliently high percentages of full tones—ranging from 60% to 70% in her speech; however, when she occasionally encountered with some issues where she lacks expertise, such as talking about her failure on her first GMAT exam, and the technical problems that occurred to her camera, her full tone percentages decreased drastically to around 15%-20%. Such a code-switching style can be observed from the percentage transition from Excerpt 5a to 5b.

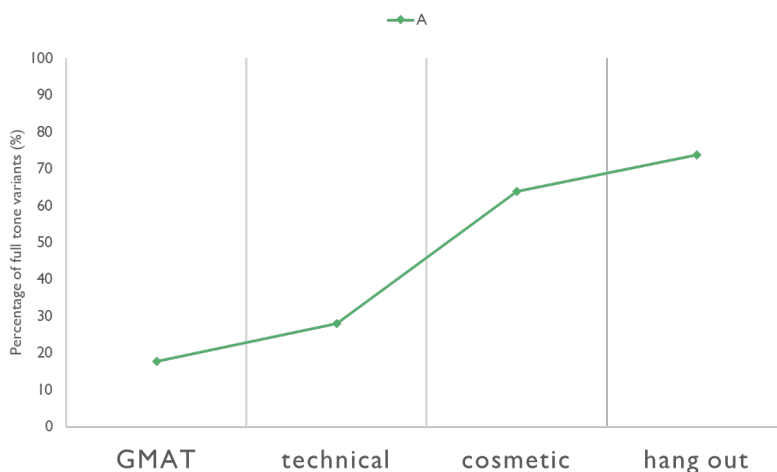


Figure 3: Full tone variation of female speaker A

Excerpt 5a: female speaker A (camera repair)

- 1 ...yin.wei(T4) ta shuo wo shi(T0) jing.tou(T0) li.mian(T0) de wen.ti, dei yao jia.neng nong,  
...because he said it's something wrong inside the lens and should be sent back to Cannon,
- 2 ran.hou(T0) wo jiu cha.le yi.xia(T0) zhe fu.jin jiu mei.you(T0) jia.neng...de dian nei.  
so I just searched the neighborhood and there is no Cannon store around.
- 3 wo.men(T2) fu.jin de Bestbuy, ye...jiu hao.xiang(T0) zhuang.xiu hai zen.me(T0).yang jiu  
guan.men le,  
and the Bestbuy near us...is like...renovation or something...is closed.
- 4 jiu zui.jin de jia.neng xiu.li(T0).dian...wo gang cha.le yi.xia(T0)...dou bu.shi(T0) zai  
san.fan, wo dou bu.zhi.dao(T0) shi nei.ge chen.shi ai.  
like...the closest repair store...I just searched it...is not in San Francisco, I don't even  
know which city it is.

Excerpt 5b: female speaker A (complaints & saijiao)

- 1 GMAT zhe.ge kao.shi(T4) ba, shi zhen.de hai ting hao ti.li(T4) de,  
Exams like GMAT is really exhausting,
- 2 wo shi zhen.de jue.de(T2) wo zi.ji(T0) de ti.li(T0) shi gen.bu(T2).shang.  
I honestly felt that I couldn't catch up with it.
- 3 ...wo yao li.ge flag zai zhe.li(T3), wo yao kai.shi jian.shen le.  
I swear that I gonna start exercising!
- 4 Hahaha...ge.ge(T2) zai pang.bian jiu yi.zhi(T2) xiao.wo, ta jue.de wo jiu zai...jiang  
xiao.hua(T4) ni zhi.dao(T0).ma...dan.shi wo zhen.de hui qu(T4) lian de.

Hahaha, he (boyfriend) is laughing at me now, he probably thinks I was just kidding, you know, but I'm really gonna go!

Even with the generally high proportion of full tones used by female speaker A, she still occasionally switched back to the Standard Mandarin style by destressing the tones of the weak syllables when the current topic was not closely related to “cuteness” or “femininity”. The code-switching by the same speaker indicates that the full tone accent is very likely to be a performative strategy to index cuteness and femininity, but when the context is no longer associated with cuteness, speakers would be less motivated to perform the *sajiao* persona and therefore decrease the usage of full tones in their speech.

## 5 Discussion

This study investigated the relation between full tone variants and speakers' social personae, demonstrating that the manipulation of lexical tones can be used to index certain social meanings of the talkers. In addition to the gender-oriented contrast of the full tone usage found in this study that female speakers tend to use full tones much more frequently than male speakers do, I elaborated on Zhang's findings (2005, 2018) by including another dimension, cute social personae, into my analyses.

The inclusion of cute personae allows me to generalize that femininity itself is not sufficient enough to motivate full tone realization, as in the results that non-cute female speakers did not exhibit high proportion of full tones in their speech; instead, full tone variants should be considered as a linguistic strategy to perform the *sajiao*, indexing the social meaning of cuteness. This implication is also supported by the finding that speakers code-switch with respect to their usages of the tonal realization depending on the topics, in that their full tone usages increased for topics which are closely related to cuteness and femininity and drastically decreased on the formal and technically related topics. These results suggest that full tone realization is more likely a characteristic-specific feature, indexing the cute social persona of the speaker, instead of a purely “cosmopolitan-related” linguistic feature.

Full tone realization, which is originally one of the common linguistic features of non-mainland Mandarin varieties (e.g., Taiwanese-accented Mandarin), is an innovative speech style emerged among native speakers of Standard Mandarin. This supraregional linguistic feature (i.e., full tone realization) was brought to the mainland audience as a consequence of globalization together with a rise of a new feminine ideology. The cute female icons appearing in the mass media were first recognized by having a linguistic feature which is distinguishable from the prosodic styles of Standard Mandarin, and that the innovative accent was later extracted from its purely linguistic contexts and adopted to index the personae of cuteness and *sajiao*, in line with the earlier claims by Silverstein (2003). This study has made clear one of the important prosodic correlates of the cute personae, and the enregisterment of the interaction between the full tone and cuteness may be in its early phase and is still ongoing (Agha 2003).

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